

The role of youth victimization trauma on the interpersonal reactivity

Ana R. Fonseca^a, Raquel M. Fernandes^a, Telma C. Almeida^{a,b}

^aIUEM – Instituto Universitário Egas Moniz, Caparica, Portugal; ^bCiiEM – Centro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Egas Moniz, IUEM
*Corresponding author: raquelfernandes97@sapo.pt

Introduction

The impact of child victimization is well documented in the literature. The exposure to maltreatment can be perpetrated inside or outside the family [1]. Victimization has a negative impact on interpersonal relationships and can harm academic professional or social life, and also mental health [2].

Empathy can be represented as interpersonal reactivity [3]. Some individuals show empathic skills. Those skills are the ability of human beings to be able to put themselves in the other's perspective [4]

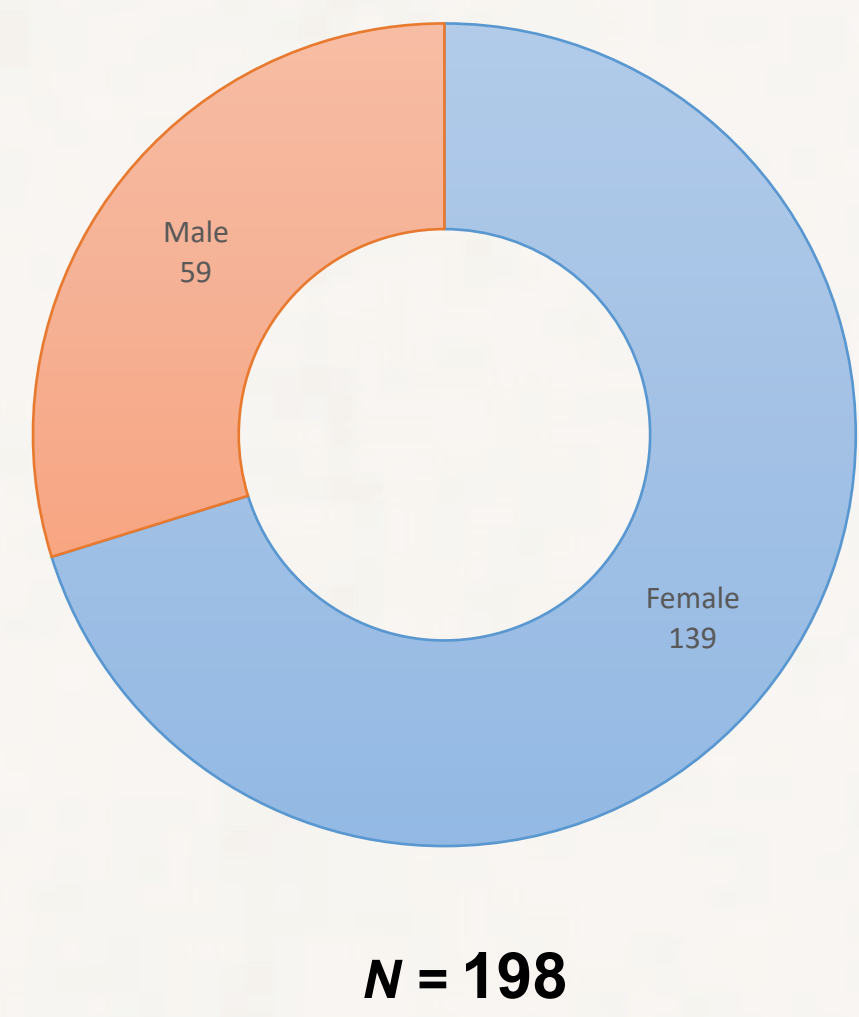
All types of violence perpetrated to a child or adolescent affect their future interpersonal relationships and may also have implications on mental health, academic and professional performance. About half of people who have suffered at least one type of victimization have shown behavioral changes [5].

Objectives

The main objective of the current study was to analyze the relationship between youth victimization trauma and the interpersonal reactivity (empathy) in adulthood.

Materials and Methods

PARTICIPANTS



Portuguese adults between 18 and 69 years old ($M = 26.9$, $SD = 11.7$)

The majority was single ($n = 168$) and Completed higher education ($n = 96$)

PROCEDURE

The data were collected online through the Google Form.

INSTRUMENTS

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) [6]

- Self-assessment instrument for exposure to maltreatment occurring up to 15 years of age. It consists of 5 subscales: Emotional Abuse, Emotional Neglect, Sexual Abuse, Physical Abuse, and Physical Neglect.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) [7]

- Self-assessment instrument with 4 subscales: Perspective, Empathic Concern, Personal Discomfort, and Fantasy.

RESULTS

Table 1
Correlations between the CTQ and the IRI ($n = 198$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 CTQ Total	—	.843**	.793**	.324**	.641**	.739**	-.648*	.062	.041	-.034	.223**	.160*
2 CTQ Emotional		—	.663**	.210**	.425**	.429**	-.617**	-.056	.050	-.024	.087	.182*
3 CTQ Emotional Neglect			—	.093	.357**	.600**	-.858**	.062	-.023	-.153*	.191*	-.005
4 CTQ Sexual Abuse				—	.004	.083	-.068	-.088	.80	.054	.036	.160*
5 CTQ Physical Abuse					—	.511**	-.408**	.174*	.006	-.012	.235**	.048
6 CTQ Physical Neglect						—	-.583**	.167*	.077	-.045	.252**	.017
7 CTQ Negation							—	-.067	-.020	.173*	-.161*	.090
8 IRI Total								—	.235**	.222**	.287**	-.398**
9 IRI Perspective Take									—	.652**	.073	.243**
10 IRI Empathic Concern										—	.132	.385**
11 IRI Personal Discomfort											—	.287**
12 IRI Fantasy												—

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Personal Discomfort was positively correlated with Emotional Neglect ($r = .191$, $p = .007$), with Physical Abuse ($r = .235$, $p = 0.01$) and Physical Neglect ($r = .252$, $p < 0.001$).

Fantasy was correlated with Emotional Abuse ($r = .182$, $p = .010$) and Sexual Abuse ($r = .160$, $p = .024$).

The total score of the IRI showed a positive correlation with Physical Abuse ($r = .174$, $p = .014$) and Physical Neglect ($r = .167$, $p = .019$).

There was a negative correlation between Empathic Concern and Emotional Neglect ($r = -.153$, $p = .032$).

There was also statistically significant correlations between the total score of the CTQ and the occurrence of Emotional Abuse ($r = .843$, $p < 0.001$), Emotional Neglect ($r = .793$, $p < 0.001$), Physical Abuse ($r = .641$, $p < 0.001$) and Physical Neglect ($r = .739$, $p < 0.001$).

Discussion and Conclusions

- When youth experience trauma due to negligence or due to any kind of physical, psychological or sexual abuse towards their parents, they tend to have the incapacity to take the other's perspectives, as well as the inability to understand their emotions. They usually show low levels of empathy [8].
- When a child suffers from this same general neglect, they tend to develop problems with his future interpersonal relationships, more specifically concerning their ability to empathize with others [9]. Some studies of victimization show that exposure to multiple types of violence is a common experience. Furthermore, an individual that experience victimization during their childhood, are at risk factors for future victimization in adulthood [10].
- This study showed the relationship between youth victimization trauma and the interpersonal reactivity (empathy), namely, with the increase of personal discomfort and the ability to place themselves in fictitious situations related to the fantasy in adulthood. Our research also proves the tendency to be a victim of multiple types of abuse [10]. According to some studies, when children suffer from neglect, they tend to show future problems on interpersonal relationships, more specifically in the capacity to empathize with others [9] and this study corroborates those outcomes.

References

[1] Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R., Turner, H. & Hamby, S. L. (2005). The Victimization of Children and Youth: A Comprehensive, National Survey. *Child Maltreatment*, 10(1), 5-25. doi:10.1177/1077559504271287

[2] Irwin, A., Li, J., Craig, W., & Hollenstein, T. (2019). The role of shame in chronic peer victimization. *School Psychology Quarterly. School Psychology*, 34(2). doi: 10.1037/spq0000280

[3] Davis, M. H. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44, 113-136. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.44.1.113

[4] Hoffman, M. L. (1991). Empathy, social cognition and moral action. In Wi. M. Kurtines & J. L. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development*. Erlbaum.

[5] Brooks, M. (2011). *Youth Experiences of Victimization:A Contextual Analysis*. Canada Department of Justice. Retrieved from: <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rd5-rf5/p5.html>

[6] Dias, A., Sales, L., Carvalho, A., Vale, I. C., Kleber, R., & Cardoso, R. M. (2013). Estudo de propriedades psicométricas do questionário de trauma de infância – Versão breve numa amostra portuguesa não clínica. *Laboratório de Psicologia*, 11(2), 103-120. doi:10.14417/lp.11.2.713

[7] Limpo, T, Alves, A. R., & Catro, S. J. (2010). Medir a empatia: Adaptação portuguesa do Índice de Reatividade Interpessoal. *Laboratório de Psicologia*, 8(2), 171-184. doi:10.14417/lp.640

[8] Moreno Manso,J., Sánchez, M., Alonso & M., Barona E., (2018). *Empathy and coping strategies in youths subject to protection measures. Children and Youth Services Review*, 93, 100-107. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.07.011

[9] Wilson, S.C. & Barber, T.X. (1983).*The fantasy-prone personality: Implication for understanding imagery, hypnosis, and parapsychological phenomena. PSI Research*, 1(3), 94-116.

[10] Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R.K., & Turner, H.A. (2007). Poly-victimization: a neglected component in child victimization. *Child abuse & Neglect*, 31(1), 7-26. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2006.06.008